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ABSTRACT

This document is a collection of questions and topics designed to assist the elementary teacher in understanding the importance and methods of instruction of language. The major premise of the document is as follows: There can be no separation of subject matter into tight compartments because in reality all teachers are teachers of English; language is fundamental to a child's thought processes and growth. The document consists of sections on the following topics: linguistics and the elementary school, the preprimary language program, reading, listening, oral and written expression, sequential objectives in the language arts, and learning problems and diagnostic teaching. Each section is followed by a brief set of references; a list of recommended references for a faculty library serves as an appendix. (JA)

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A TEACHER'S NOTEBOOK: LANGUAGE ARTS, K-4

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FOREWORD

This is the first installment of questions and topics that the Language Arts Committee has proposed to itself. We are a group of practitioners in the field, not experts or researchers, and therefore the topics and comments found in this notebook are those that have occurred to us as we teach or prepare materials for teaching. What we are presenting here are some thoughts, practices, and suggested reading that we hope will make your work as a teacher more effective and rewarding.

At the end of the sections are some references pertinent to the content. These are resources for further reading on the subject. The committee reviewed many references and texts in preparing the notebook and assembled an annotated list of books that would be valuable additions to a faculty library. This list appears at the end, under Recommended References.

Occasionally in the future we expect to alter a position, supplement a scant presentation, or revise an entire section of this notebook. Therefore, be prepared to receive word of such changes from time to time. Our suggestions are not intended to be rigid and prescriptive, but flexible and descriptive. We believe that each school can best decide its own course of action.

Because language arts is the responsibility of everyone teaching young children, this notebook is intended to be of help to all teachers, in every discipline. We seek your response. If you take issue with what we are saying or if you have materials you would like to be considered for inclusion in future versions of the notebook, please communicate with any one of us or with the Language Arts Committee, National Association of Independent Schools, 4 Liberty Square, Boston, Massachusetts 02109.

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I. LANGUAGE AND LEARNING

Importance of Language to Learning

Is language arts concerned solely with reading, composition, and literature? Is there a relation between language development and thought processes?

Increased attention is being given to the role of language in all learning. While educators have long recognized that command of language is essential to academic learning, recent research shows a high correlation among language ability, problem-solving, and control of behavior. Memory for any but the simplest concept is dependent on language. The investigations of psychologists--Gagne, Luria, Bruner, to mention just a few--has extended this view beyond armchair speculation to demonstrated principle. The importance of the relation between language and thought makes language learning transcend mere achievement of academic success.

It therefore behooves the teacher to extend the goals of a language arts program beyond success in reading and oral and written composition to the areas of social intercourse, self-concept, and, indeed, to the total life of the child. Such an approach demands the maximum of individual instruction and planning and requires an awareness on the part of the teacher that exceeds any ordinary set of curriculum guidelines. It demands integrated knowledge of child development, linguistics, language-instruction methods, and love of children and language. Curriculum guidelines can at best present only a few suggestions to assist the teacher in this task.

Assumptions about Language Learning

The following passage is adapted from the General Introduction to the Minimum Curriculum for Kindergarten through Grade Five, published in 1964 by the Elementary English Committee of the National Association of Independent Schools. Because many of the assumptions are still valid for the teaching of language, we include this abbreviated statement here.

> Learning to understand and use the English language is the primary task of children in elementary grades. The native--and classroom--language becomes the fundamental tool for comprehending and communicating with the child's widening world, not only when dealing closely with literature, composition, and speech, but whenever English is the language of the classroom.
>
> Especially for the young child, "the native language is not merely a means of communication. It is an integral part of the entire development of the pupil and of his growing ability to organize and understand his world, and to cope with it. It is perhaps the central part, at once the means and the index, of this growth. It is, furthermore, both the material and process of his thinking" (in Definition of the Requirements, formerly published annually by NAIS).

These assumptions mean that there can be no separation of subject matter into tight compartments: all teachers are teachers of English. Those teachers in elementary grades who instruct in several subjects have a special opportunity, as well as obligation, to see that English is used with the same respect and skill in every class, whether it be composition or science.

For purposes of description it is often necessary to speak of the study of composition, spelling, or reading; but these are merely aspects of one subject, and any attempt to separate them is artificial. The best teaching is that in which all phases of the language are taught together, and one kind of understanding is used to illuminate another.

A wide and varied experience from life and books, creating awareness, curiosity, and an interest in words and ideas, provides a young child with the strongest impetus for learning his language. He will need language to organize, interpret, and communicate. He will realize that books open the doors to a world of imagination, ideas, and adventure that goes far beyond what he can attain in his own life. The skills of language in turn will lead him to a broadening of experience through reading, talking, and listening. The more closely the teaching follows experience and interest, the greater will be the motivation for learning and the more efficient and effective will be the teaching.

Just as reading begins with listening, writing begins with speaking. A child makes his first progress in the skills of writing when he learns to speak clearly and to organize his sentences, long before he learns to use a pencil. He speaks when he has something to relate or question or comment on--when he has the need to communicate. His writing also should stem from a need to say something and should not be the result of sudden, imposed subject matter unrelated to his interest and experience. The many natural interests of children, and others which a skillful teacher will stimulate, provide a rich background of material for the teaching of writing.

Content should precede form; if a child knows what he wants to say, he is ready to learn how good form can help him say it. Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are merely means toward the end of better reading, writing, and speaking. They should never become ends in themselves, and the time and emphasis put on them should reflect this attitude. These tools of language become meaningful only as children see the need of them and can apply them to their own work.

Understanding should deepen, and use become more automatic, each year. The study of English cannot be arbitrarily separated into grade levels any more than it can be separated into spelling and writing and grammar.

This minimum curriculum does not define teaching methods as such, but in the early grades methods and goals are so closely interwoven that there is of necessity some overlapping. The suggestions made here

assume well-known and long-used techniques of teaching reading, spelling, and composition. However, teachers are encouraged to be bold and imaginative in planning for the needs of their own groups or classes. New methods of teaching and new theories about language may provide a deeper understanding of the complexities of our changing language and may, in fact, lead to more satisfactory methods of teaching children to read and write. In short, a curriculum is effective only if a teacher can apply it with knowledge, intelligence, imagination, and understanding.

Language Acquisition

What are some current positions on language acquisition? How do they affect methods of teaching?

Some researchers, such as Chomsky, McNeill, and Lenneberg, assert that language is innate: children order language experience naturally and discover principles and rules. Other researchers, like Mowrer and Skinner, believe that language is acquired by environmental conditioning, with children obtaining from the environment those elements of communication that are present there. These are the opposite ends of a continuum of assumptions. As research becomes more definitive and refined, it is possible that some middle position will prevail or that it will be determined that some aspects of language learning are innate, while others are acquired.

It would be wise for the teacher to assess instructional approaches for the basic theoretical position that each represents and to avoid labeling one as "right" and another as "wrong." Accepting the "nature-nurture" dilemma is a step in the right direction. In dealing with an individual child, or even a class, if the prepared (or conditioning) environment has not produced the desired results, the stage of developmental readiness may need to be considered. A teacher must understand the unfolding process of language development. For example, a child who is still overgeneralizing such forms as "bring-brang" will probably read and say "brang" until a later period of his development. While the process of development may be uniform for most children, the rate at which it occurs will vary. Furthermore, certain syntactic constructions are not understood or used by most children until they are in their middle years. However, children who have not been exposed to a rich and varied language experience can benefit from an approach similar to that of Bereiter-Engelmann, where repetition of phrases and sentences introduces new ways of speaking.

If children are to be well taught, synthesis of the theoretical positions concerning language acquisition is in order. Examining our assumptions will help us to gain perspective and make a number of approaches to a single language problem possible.

Perspectives on Linguistics

What is the relation between linguistics and language learning? Of what benefit can study of linguistics be to the early-elementary teacher?

In the article that follows, Robert Boynton puts some conflicting ideas on linguistics into perspective. The science of linguistics concerns itself with all aspects of language--phonics, phonetics, grammar, usage, semantics, syntax, and history and development. The theoretical considerations with which linguists deal have become part of the educator's concerns. Whereas traditional teaching methods were not called into question in the past by the theoretical assumptions of many disciplines, more recent research has begun to challenge many classroom practices. However, experienced teachers can find comfort in learning that many of their intuitive approaches to teaching language are being "discovered" by the linguists.

There are many "tongues" exploiting the term "linguistics." While publishers who present material as a "linguistic approach" to the teaching of the language arts are not incorrect in labeling it as such, they seem to forget that every systematic approach to the teaching of language having a theoretical foundation can be so designated. Both Dechant and Shane (1967) provide suggestions for obtaining further insights into this important field.

Linguistics and the Elementary School

Robert Boynton

The word "linguistics" is as gingerly handled these days as the word "integration." You have to be for it or against it, and God help you if you look puzzled or indifferent. It smacks of "science," "rigor," "arcana" to the worshipful, and of smuggery to the solid folk. The textbook companies and curriculum committees are for it in public pronouncements but ignore it in private. The real linguists seldom stand up in school audiences, and then only to yawn.

Any teacher dealing with English for natives needs to come to grips with the term before integrating into his teachings and learnings some of the insights of modern linguistics. As a negative starter, linguistics is not a subject for the elementary or high school grades; it is not a field for in-service cram sessions; it is not a must before anyone starts working in a classroom; it is not a cure for all the language-learning ills that plague the schools; it is not a term to be thrown around haphazardly. The best attitude toward the term may well be in agreement not to use it when talking about the study of, and study in, language in classrooms below the college level.

What should be talked about is language study as part of an abiding concern in schools with communication and human behavior broadly conceived. Language is only one of the media of communication that all of us should be literate in and about, but it is the most important one, and teachers must foster and strengthen knowledge about it, skill in using it, and intelligent attitudes toward it. A teacher does not have to be well trained in linguistics to do a good job in this area, but he cannot risk being ignorant of that portion of what linguists are saying that runs counter to the popular wisdom of the well-educated. Perhaps the greatest danger in elementary school lies in having the wrong assumptions, the wrong attitudes, the wrong expectations about many language matters. Even a modest amount of study in linguistics can raise the right flags and lower the wrong ones.

A few blunt assertions about language study in the elementary school may serve to bolster or challenge convictions now in operation and suggest avenues for further questioning, response, change. Some of the following may be overstated, but none of it is simply flippant. Much of it is ripe for elaboration and refinement. All of it suggests ways in which "linguistics" has applicability to what goes on in the classroom, even though linguistics itself should pursue other ends.

1. The language the child brings to school is a precious part of him, even if it never occurs to him to say or know that he believes so. (Make fun of how he talks and see how he responds.) Schools must respect his "home" tongue and know full well why and how they intend to make changes, if they do. (Chances are that the subject never comes up in any serious way in faculty lounges or meetings. Its implications could profitably occupy a full year's time in both places.)

2. All children bring a rich language background to school regardless of what kind of home situation they come from. The school's use of "rich" in this context is only one of a number of possible definitions. "Nonverbalness" is more a judgment on the environment the "nonverbal" child finds in school than on him or on the environment he calls home.

3. Children know that they use different kinds of language in different social situations. They need to learn that such behavior is intelligent, appropriate, respected. They need insight into and practice with the varieties and subtleties of language gear-shifting. Taste is not legislated; it's nurtured with patience.

4. Everyone speaks a dialect of his native language (or several dialects, in terms of #3). No dialect is "superior" to another except as social distinctions (which are real and must be recognized) determine such superiority. Difference is not oddity. Children need to understand the groundrules that determine dialect distinctions, and they need to learn to respect difference, not disparage or deride it.

5. "Appropriateness" is generally a better word to use in dealing with usage than "correctness" or "rightness." This does not mean that anything goes, nor does it mean that "correct" or "right" cannot be accurately applied to given usages under given circumstances. It simply suggests that there are more gray areas than black or white ones. Teachers need a clear picture of what is meant by "usage" and how language behavior governs it.

6. Language is the most conservative of all human institutions. People who worry about its being destroyed or debased or subverted or soiled also worry about the imminence of the next Ice Age. Experimenting with it, testing it, wrenching it, malaproping it may lead to occasional absurdity and tastelessness, but that small embarrassment is far better than meaningless fuss about keeping it pure. It changes as the seas change, slowly and imperceptibly, but is less subject to long-range deadening pollution. The moral is that children should be encouraged to play with language and be made aware of how it has changed over the years and will continue to change.

7. Formal grammar study as an aid to improved writing and reading skills is probably a waste of time in elementary school. The burden of proof to the contrary is on the contrary-believers. This does not mean that teachers should ignore what the linguists have been saying about grammars recently: the more they know, the better. There may well be great value in using various structured exercises in teaching writing and reading, but teachers will have to know a lot more about language structure than most of us do now to use them wisely and well. Drill in the naming of parts does not throw much light on syntax, which is the heart of the matter. Without solid training in the various approaches to English grammar, elementary school teachers had best leave grammar study as such to somebody somewhere else.

8. Knowing how to spell well is a social necessity. The only communication block resulting from faulty spelling is the social one that stamps the misspeller as ignorant (which is block enough). The social stigma should be absent in schoolrooms: learning to spell is hard enough without adding guilt to the load. Teachers who pounce on misspellings as misdemeanors have a pillory complex.

9. English spelling is more consistent than is commonly thought. Teaching approaches should build on that fact instead of concentrating foremost on oddities. Spelling bees and their like are as antisocial as the Super Bowl game, and just as silly.

10. Writing should start when reading starts. There should be a constant focus on the social nature of language: someone says something to someone else, and he usually expects the game to continue. The point is not foolishly obvious. Somehow schools communicate to children that writing and reading are for teacher consumption and evaluation, that what is being done with language in the classroom is always being tested, that the someone else in the object position couldn't care less about what is being said or who says it in any way except from on high. Writing should be a daily activity; the speaker-audience situation should be varied and genuine; evaluation should not mean correction and should be subtly supportive.

11. There is no such thing as a or the linguistics approach to reading. Linguists have a lot to say about speech-writing relationships, and familiarity with what they say can reduce the amount of nonsense that many adults have in their heads about the nature of speech and its representation in writing. Decoding is not reading, but reading cannot proceed far until the decoding process is internalized. The intonation patterns of speech are essential to meaning; they are poorly represented in the writing system, and that fact may well be the major source of reading problems. The seeming haphazardness of speech, its redundancy beyond the normal and necessary redundance of natural language, is unconsciously accepted and expected and is extremely important to the transfer of meaning from speaker to hearer. Similar redundancy in writing is unacceptable, and that fact, too, creates reading problems.

12. Awareness of the nonverbal accompaniments of speech (gesture, manner, nonspeech sounds) will give teachers and children a clearer under-

standing of how people affect each other unintentionally (or maybe intentionally). As important as daily reading and writing are daily opportunities to speak in a variety of roles and to react to a variety of roles. Viewing the classroom as a theater workshop suggests the necessary richness of language activity that must take place if children are going to grow in creative control of their language.

13. Reading good literature should be an early and continuing group and personal activity. People (including teachers) who write material for young children should know the difference between the syntactic simplicity that echoes normal English patterning and the simple-minded syntax-chopping that sounds like second-rate pidgin. Children should hear and read good prose and poetry day in and day out, the kind that sensitive adults can return to and enjoy. Matters of tone and rhythm and metaphor should be stressed from the earliest grades. Memorization and imitation of good writing should be encouraged, but only within a context that clearly makes them part of the "theater workshop" classroom and never a memory-training or testing mechanism.

Resources for Further Reading

Britton, James. Language and Learning. A Pelican Book. Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, Inc., 1972.

Dechant, Emerald. Linguistics, Phonics and the Teaching of Reading. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1969.

Shane, Harold G. Linguistics and the Classroom Teacher. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, NEA, 1201-16th Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, 1967.

II. THE PRE-PRIMARY LANGUAGE PROGRAM

How can the pre-primary program contribute to future language growth? What areas should the curriculum emphasize?

The pre-primary teacher has the unique opportunity and responsibility to assess a child's language usage in order to ensure that future instruction will be beneficial. Each child comes to school with a different language experience. No matter what the level of attainment, the child's language skills can be fostered and developed at the pre-primary level if a systematic approach is made. Too often teachers erroneously assume that mere exposure will have a positive effect. Instruction must be deliberate, and every effort should be made to evaluate the child's progress and relate instruction to it.

The pre-primary language program should consist of the following opportunities for children.

Engaging in conversation. Observation of many classrooms leads to the conclusion that children do not do as much of the talking as they should. Encouraging an adequate amount of conversation requires planning and a fine balance of control and relaxation in classroom management. Setting a tape recorder in the painting, play, or housekeeping corner will enable a teacher to monitor the speech of the children there. Valuable insights into ways of helping them can be derived from listening to these tapes after the children have left. Hand or finger puppets can be successful in encouraging reticent children to join the discussion: "What do you think the lion is saying to the tiger, Johnny?"

Sharing information and expressing ideas and personal feelings. "I tell someone and then I know." Framing one's ideas in words helps to clarify thinking at all ages, but it is particularly important for the child in moving from concrete experience to symbolic expression of experience. The ability to use appropriate words for objects, experiences, and feelings can be developed by careful guidance. Television is a common denominator for most children that can provide a basis for sharing ideas as well as for encouraging critical and discriminating judgments about language and language usage. Common school experiences such as trips or projects can be focal points for vital language expression.

Listening to records, tapes, stories, poems, music. The habit of listening can be fostered. Contrary to most beliefs, children spend a great part of their time in quiet watching and listening. This latter trait can be strengthened by providing interesting listening experiences. The tape recorder is a helpful device. Instructions for an activity can be placed on tape. The children can listen individually and perform the activity, leaving the teacher free to observe the amount of careful listening and the quality of comprehension that are taking place. This can be a game where a child can

enjoy the special attention he is being given. Tapes made of sounds that children can identify--the traffic on the corner by the school, the sounds of each other's voices on the playground--can assist in sound discrimination and aid the listening habit. Listening to good poetry, stories, and music are also necessary to pre-primary language experience.

Following directions. At this age auditory processing can be checked by the ways children follow directions. The developmental level and experiential background of the child are factors to be considered, for many children are unaccustomed to taking directions of any complexity. Language-complexity levels are important here, too. In addition to the taped instructions mentioned above, various games can be devised that provide amusement as well as training. With a flannel board the child can "put the cow on top of the barn and the bird on the farmer's hat." Following classmates' directions provides additional language experience in that the child giving the instructions must use appropriate language in order to be understood.

Asking questions and seeking information. Is there time to listen to the many questions young children have? Is there help given in formulating questions so that answers can be meaningful and the desired information be obtained? Knowing what one's question is can be the first step toward an answer or the solution of a problem. One way to help children is to play games using the familiar question words "where?" "when?" "why?" "how?" "who?" "what?" "which?" For instance, a child can be told to skip across the room and others be asked, "How is Mary crossing the room?" Teaching the word patterns used for questions will also assist the child.

Taking part in group discussion. Small groups and brief periods are important to valuable exchange of ideas at this age. Classroom procedures, subjects close to the real lives of the children, and recent and immediate experiences are usually the best topics. Accepting a child's contribution and language usage is desirable. Correction or modification of what is said can be accomplished by rephrasing in the form of a question or a reinforcing statement. "I goed with my brother to the circus" can be restated, with a smile, by the teacher: "I'm glad you went with your brother to the circus."

Becoming involved in creative dramatics. Dramatizing the probable outcome of a story situation may be easier and more effective than conceptualizing it in words. A small puppet stage, easily made of large cardboard boxes, can be part of every classroom. Homemade stick puppets are as appealing as fancy ones from the store. Sharing a "committee" production with others can be just as rewarding at this age as later.

Participating in dramatic play. Boxes used as a store or a gas station, in addition to the usual housekeeping corner, are incentives for dramatic play. Revealing language patterns emerge as the children lose themselves in sharing and role-playing. Toy telephones are also important "props."

Improving and enlarging vocabulary. Vocabulary development by itself is meaningless and dull. Introduction to words is best done by connecting them with real-life experience. Vicarious experience, through television and other media, must also be taken into account. Teachers can make lists of words that are special to a given project, such as a vocabulary list to accompany a study of the source of honey: "pollen," "comb," "nectar," and other related words.

Making inferences. A program that provides games and riddles for children will set the stage for later inferential thinking. Rest and snack times can be utilized for playing guessing games as well as for social exchange.

Becoming aware of what words do and do not do, and of how our bodies and voices add to meaning. Marie Hall Ets's book Talking Without Words (Viking) is a fine example of helping young children to understand "body English." The tape recorder can be an aid to hearing differences in pitch and stress. However, children need first to be made aware of tone of voice. Imitating the petulant voice, the timid voice, the bold and boisterous voice in character representation can point to further discrimination. Analyzing the ways each child can present oral material for certain types of response is a good way to begin: "How do we use our voices when we want to ask Mother a question?" Children enjoy nonsense syllables; a guessing game using these with different stresses can illustrate questions, statements, or commands.

Reading when ready. Much has been written about the early reader. Dolores Durkin's studies show that many children read at an early age. Her research in examining and working with children has led to the conclusions that "most kindergarten or first grade children are probably neither totally unready nor totally ready to begin to read," and that a factor in starting instruction is the capacity of the school, the teacher, and organization to make effective adjustments for the variety of needs represented in this step (Teaching Them to Read, p. 43). Certainly television viewing, Head Start programs, and other educational techniques make it imperative for each pre-primary teacher to have a well-considered philosophy of reading instruction and a knowledge of reading-instruction methods.

Such things as labels on classroom supplies and words attached to objects in a science or social studies display provide the natural association that is the beginning of reading for most children. A typewriter in the classroom can assist the teacher in identifying those children who are interested in words and reading and be a useful teaching aid if there are children ready for instruction. Wherever the printed and written word can be introduced functionally and naturally it should be done, for to neglect this aspect of language learning is to fail to assess the child's language development and capacities.

The pre-primary teacher's records should contain explicit information about the child's language development. The teacher should also be familiar

with various tests of intellectual ability and reading readiness and should know the skills required for taking these tests. Instruction should be directed, not toward meeting the requirements of the tests, but toward enhancing the teacher's knowledge of the stages of the child's development in the communication process.

Resources for Further Reading

Blackie, John. Inside the Primary School. New York: Schocken Books, 1971.

Robison, Helen F., and Bernard Spodek. New Directions in the Kindergarten. New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 1965.

III. READING

Is There a "Best Method" of Teaching Reading?

The recent research of Albert Harris (How to Increase Reading Ability, pp. 76-79) offers some valuable conclusions on teaching methods.

Harris says that no one beginning approach to reading has any consistent advantage and that no single method has been able to eliminate failure. He finds that long-term achievement (more important than the beginning approach to reading) depends on "the quality of administrative leadership, of teaching skill, and of pupil ability (in turn related to characteristics of home and neighborhood)."

Word-study skills should be taught in systematic fashion from the outset. Writing is also an important part of the success of any method.

A combination of programs is often superior to a single method. The language-experience approach strengthens any other method being used.

The teacher is more important in producing results than any particular methods or materials used. The teacher should bear in mind the general tendency for girls to learn reading with more facility than boys in the early years of school.

Beginning Reading

What is the language-experience approach to teaching beginning reading? What are its strengths? What material about it is available?

For reasons that will become apparent, the Language Arts Committee endorses the language-experience approach for beginning reading groups. It is a truly integrated language-skill method of teaching reading, having as some of its primary advantages increased interest in reading on the part of children, ease of individualizing instruction, and early involvement of various curricular areas in the reading process. The method also encourages early development of independence in study and work habits and is suitable for various schemes of classroom organization, from the open classroom to the most structured one. It also gives the teacher great freedom with respect to content and the teaching of word-identification skills.

While many teachers have employed this approach, it has been most successfully developed and described by such reading authorities as Russell Stauffer and Roach Van Allen. Current literature and research carry substantial evidence that the method is linguistically sound and produces attitudes and habits upon which later instruction can build.

The language-experience approach emphasizes communication as a fundamental human characteristic by integrating oral and written expression with

reading from the very beginning. Initially, children dictate stories that serve as the material they read. Themes for the stories come from curricular or extracurricular experiences of the group or of individuals. Pictures drawn by the children or taken with a Polaroid camera illustrate and provide the focus of these "experience stories." Together, these pictures and stories are the first books the children have. However, readers and library books can also be used for group and individual instruction.

Conversational style is encouraged from the very first word or sentence the child dictates. His level of language usage is accepted, even if it is not standard. However, stories are edited if they are to be reproduced for general reading purposes. The introduction of language patterns of standard English gradually bring the child's own expression into closer accord with printed material from the usual academic sources--texts and library materials. A tape recorder is an invaluable aid to the teacher in obtaining the materials to be used.

As a child rereads his dictated stories, he acquires a vocabulary that Stauffer refers to as a "word bank." These words are placed on cards, are

alphabetized, and are used to illustrate phonic and structural-analysis principles and to develop word-identification as well as spelling skills. The teacher may use any scheme of word study that is appropriate for the particular child and with which he is comfortable. The child is encouraged to look for words from his word bank that appear in places other than his own stories. Looking for words in newspapers and magazines not only reinforces the learning of words; seeing them in different type faces and sizes helps to develop visual discrimination.

Writing begins immediately when the child is asked to sign his dictated story and the picture that accompanies it. As he progresses, he labels his pictures and eventually writes his own stories by copying the words from his

word bank. A word-card holder helps the child to construct sentences and learn punctuation. Emphasis on punctuation and syntax as elements of clarity of communication gives the child more meaningful perspective on these areas of instruction. Sharing ideas and communicating remain the important focus at all times.

The child can make his own dictionary by using a notebook and entering words from his word bank. A vowel key of his own making at the beginning of his notebook will help him to analyze words and arrive inductively at phonetic rules. Individual or group instruction in phonics and spelling (phonemic-graphemic correspondence) is given as readiness and need are seen. The language-experience approach does not endorse one method, but encourages the teacher to be eclectic in his approach and sensitive to the learning styles of the various students.

The language-experience approach is very effective throughout the elementary years. As the child develops his skills, the content will shift from dictated stories based on personal experiences or observation to areas of interest in which materials come from the library, laboratory, and other sources. Reading instruction can represent in school what reading is in mature life--a means of obtaining information, enjoyment, self-realization. It is still integrated with writing, since students can prepare subjects of particular interest to them for sharing with others. Indeed, many different means of communication, such as tapes, slides, posters, films, and poetry, can be employed. A child should have access to a multimedia center, where he can obtain what he needs for his presentation.

Several students investigating the same subject can either work together or, by working individually, find an opportunity to compare one version of a subject with another. When students present their work, the critique, self-imposed as well as provided by classmates, is of value to the student in assessing his own work and progress. Early reliance on peers is growth-producing. (Contrast the impact of this method of evaluation with teacher-determined standards, ideas, and grades.) Emphasis is placed on the student's success of communication rather than on the grade he receives. Comprehension of what he has read in preparation for presenting the subject is a truer estimate of reading skill than any test.

Resources for Further Reading

Allen, Roach Van. "How a Language Experience Program Works." A Decade of Innovations: Approaches to Beginning Reading. Newark, Del.: Convention Proceedings, 1-8 International Reading Association, 12, Part 3, 1967.

Stauffer, Russell G. The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper & Row, 1970.

Reading Comprehension

What is reading comprehension? What helps students to understand what they

read? How should comprehension skills be emphasized?

The elements of reading comprehension are complex, varied, and interrelated. Reading comprehension is the reconstruction of experience as represented by written symbols and words.

Skills necessary for comprehension are a knowledge of word meanings and the ability to make inferences. It is important, therefore, that children be exposed to a wide background of experience that is discussed, labeled, and explicated in a variety of ways so that word knowledge is broadened. (Accurate word recognition is essential, of course.) Development of the ability to do inferential thinking is a lifelong process not confined to the reading class or to school sessions alone. It is a skill to which every experience can add dimensions. Fundamentally, it is the ability to reason, which involves organization of material, classification, recognition of incongruity, seeing cause-and-effect relationships, determining purpose, solving problems, and all of the other facets of cognition.

The level of comprehension is affected by the reader's interest in the material, the difficulty of it with respect to his development of skills, and his familiarity with it. These factors are interrelated because it is immediately apparent that a child who wants to learn about a subject of vital interest to him will surmount the difficulty level, and his familiarity will reinforce interest. It is necessary to mention these factors so that care will be taken to select materials for reading that are appropriate for developing good comprehension.

Listening comprehension is an important step toward effective reading comprehension. In the early years of school the child's listening vocabulary exceeds his reading vocabulary, and the teacher can use the same techniques for developing comprehension of oral material that are necessary for reading comprehension. Helping the child to recognize, through games, the fantastic or the nonsensical in sentences and rhymes--"Put your mittens on so your feet won't be cold"--encourages discrimination. Riddles are excellent ways to promote verbal comprehension. Permitting children to complete sentences--"The cats we see at Hallowe'en are usually _____" helps selectivity. Encourage the child in sequential thinking by asking him to identify an unneeded step in a series of directions he is given. Pantomime or dramatization of a story told or read helps in developing recall of detail and sequencing as well as in finding the main idea.

When reading is begun, systematic teaching in the primary grades is required for mastery of comprehension skills. Too often there is little attention to meaning once the teacher has been assured that the child can recognize the words in the material. A directed reading lesson helps the beginner set a purpose and anticipate events, both of which are necessary to understanding.

If the child is to bring thought to the words he is to read, his purpose in approaching the selection must be clear to him. He can then anticipate what the material will bring to his understanding and discover if his expectations match what was presented. Such questions as "Can you find out if . . .?" "What problems will be solved if . . .?" should be posed before reading.

A next step would be perceiving which details are important to the question. "What facts do you have?" "What sentences or words answer the following questions?" A corollary to this process would be to ask why certain other ideas were included in the selection, thereby setting the stage for some understanding of clarity of expression and style in writing.

The child needs to be able to combine details in a useful or significant way. At this point the ability to organize, classify, and discriminate, to synthesize those into a conclusion, is important. The teacher needs to help him to see the relationships between ideas. Comparisons and contrasts can be specifically pointed out: "How is this like . . .?" "How is John's family different from Sam's?" "What does this remind you of?" In expository selections the unfolding of the logic or process can be done by asking the child to make lists of the ideas or represent the sequence in drawings, as in a cartoon. "What had to be done first?"

Understanding beyond literal meaning, distinguishing between fact and opinion, are sophisticated skills. The mature reader begins this function by relating what he reads to previous knowledge and experience. In a story situation a beginning reader understands when the characters and their conversations and acts are familiar to him. However, understanding how a character feels when something not stated or known happens can be brought to the child's attention. "What kind of person would . . .?" "What would you do if . . .?" "What does this mean to you?"

Finally, appreciation can be developed: "What words/paragraphs set the tone of the story?" "How does the author make you feel about it?" "How would you like . . .?"

Adequate comprehension can be developed only by consistent and systematic attention at each level of reading ability. For reading in the subject matter areas, the necessary background knowledge and vocabulary must be supplied by those teaching in these areas. Comprehension in one discipline does not ensure an equal level of understanding in another. Most reading programs provide selections in various areas of interest, but to achieve the in-depth comprehension required each teacher must be a reading teacher.

IV. LISTENING

What is listening? To what extent and how does listening provide the basis of understanding language and the ability to use it? How can instruction in listening skills be organized to make them effective in learning?

Effective listening is crucial to communication. Speaking-listening seems to be a major mode of instruction. Reading and writing both appear to be dependent on the ability to listen. The ways people respond to issues, how they think, and how they solve problems reflect their listening skills.

Passivity, a result of the tremendous amount of time many children spend with television, can cause them to be dependent on visual representation for comprehension. When they are deprived of pictures they are often unable to form mental images, to listen discriminatingly, or to question selectively what they hear. In the classroom, it is advisable to state early whether listening is compulsory or optional and to give the children a framework for effective listening.

Listening is like reading because both involve receiving information. Listening resembles speaking because both use sound rather than written symbols. Attitudes and feelings frequently affect what one hears. Listening is much more than simply paying attention and concentrating; learning from material presented orally is a complex process. Listening necessitates hearing, deriving meaning, and making use of that meaning.

The extent of a child's auditory vocabulary can provide insight into his potential reading and writing levels, since aural comprehension is an essential forerunner of oral learning. Without adequate understanding of words or ideas, listening loses its effectiveness as a way to learn. Children can gain more from listening when they have had some introduction to new ideas to be presented. Skill in listening is facilitated if stories and poems are carefully selected and, of course, if the teacher reads them well. Often it is helpful to let children listen to material a second time, after it has been discussed, so that they can sort out and evaluate what they may have missed the first time. Effective listening requires children to participate actively.

There needs to be provision for systematic instruction in listening because listening is vital to the development of all verbal skills--speaking, reading, and writing. In fact, reading comprehension can be improved through exercises in listening. The teacher must be aware of the different levels of listening, of a wide variety of materials, and of the interaction between a speaker and his listener(s). Ruth Strickland points out that, in listening, one must recognize sound patterns, attach meaning to them, react to the sound patterns in terms of one's own experience, put that material into perspective and, finally, remember whatever means enough to be remembered.

Pose Lamb provides examples of six levels of thought processes that are

useful in understanding listening levels: knowledge of the subject, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. She provides a functional scheme for teaching listening skills, with the caveat that the teacher must help the child transfer them to other language arts. Her analysis of the Kellogg listening model--asking "Who?" "What?" "When?" "Where?" "Why and/or How? So What and So How?"--helps the listener evaluate information.

In using the Kellogg model, a listener must ask himself questions at each level as he listens. Recall involves simply "Who?" "When?" "Where?" or "What?" Analysis involves "Why?" and "How did that happen?" At the next level, the listener must think about the significance of what he has heard--what it means. At the last level he uses relationships to see applications to a new situation. Recall involves memory; information analysis requires deductive thinking and synthesis inductive thinking; application of information requires both types of thinking.

Teachers who truly understand levels of comprehension can improve their own listening skills and thereby better understand how to help their students. Teachers can train themselves to be better listeners, too.

Resource for Further Reading

Lamb, Pose. Guiding Children's Language Learning. 2d ed. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Co., 1971.

V. ORAL AND WRITTEN EXPRESSION

How do children become independent writers and speakers who have the language necessary for the demands of their personal and social lives?

The part played by oral and written language in the development of children should be the concern of all teachers. It is important that a sequential curriculum be planned that considers oral and written language as interrelated from the child's earliest years in school into college. If concepts are presented in spiral-curriculum fashion, the student will mature in his depth of understanding and use of language. The teacher has to evaluate each child's needs and then use carefully and individually planned combinations of language experiences in a supportive atmosphere of stimulation and guidance.

Oral Expression

How important is oral language? What are the objectives of effective oral communication?

Oral language is the foundation of the language arts. Success for the child in each facet of his life in our highly verbal society depends on his ability to communicate. Therefore it is imperative for the teacher to develop the child's speech ability and to provide a variety of speaking experiences in the classroom.

Since a child's language affects his self-image and his ability in other areas of language arts, systematic instruction in oral language cannot begin too soon. Basic attitudes, skills, and abilities needed for effective speech can be developed throughout the child's school day, and do not need to be restricted to the language arts period.

Linguists are helping teachers realize that there should be more emphasis on oral language in the classroom, since speech is the primary form of language. Small-group work and use of the tape recorder allow for more student participation, which, in turn, decreases the need for teacher domination. The studies of Gagne and Smith show the positive effects of verbalization in problem-solving. Other studies show that desired performance in verbal behavior can be reinforced by social approval. Ruth Strickland reminds teachers to avoid making too many critical comments when helping students improve their oral usage.

Ruth Strang points out that the essentials for effective communication are a thought; grammatically acceptable sentence structure; precise and vivid words spoken with appropriate stress, pitch, and intonation; a pleasing voice; knowledge of the subject; and a desire to communicate.

Clive Sansom extends these points with the following "objectives of oral

communication":[1]

--to help each child develop and express his own personality, including his imaginative and creative powers

--to help him understand and cooperate with others

--to increase his control over the mechanics of speech so that he can communicate more effectively

--to encourage the growth of a "middle language" (halfway between literary speech and playground chatter) that still enables him to meet a variety of social situations

--to develop a love of language through enjoyment found in the spontaneous use of words

These objectives provide language arts teachers with explicit goals in their efforts to guide the growth of students in oral language. Specific suggestions for developing oral language and a variety of suggested activities for implementing the language arts program may be found in some of the books listed in Recommended References.

Written Expression

How can children learn to express their opinions and experiences in a clear, accurate, and imaginative style?

From the beginning of the school experience, the student needs a varied and rich supply of ideas. A child makes his first progress in writing skills when he learns to speak clearly and to organize his sentences. A skilled teacher makes sure that there are many opportunities to write where children can actually share ideas and develop a feeling for appropriate words and vivid images. Writing should stem from the need to say something and not be the result of imposed subject matter unrelated to the students' interests and experience.

According to Ruth Strickland (The Language Arts in the Elementary School, p. 299), "The most difficult of all man's language skills is writing." She enumerates the skills necessary in the following way; a writer must

1. make up his mind what to write and arrange his ideas in the sequence he wants to produce

2. put the ideas into words and the words into sentences that say

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[1]From Sansom, Speech in the Primary School, as quoted in Shane, Walden, and Green, Interpreting Language Arts Research, p. 15.

what he wants to say yet are conventional and clear enough so that the reader can interpret his thought

3. come to terms with a sentence before he starts to write it. One cannot edit amid ships as he does in speech when he says, "All of us, three to be exact, thought that--we definitely concluded that--." Everyone does some of this editing in speech yet it cannot be done in writing

4. write horizontally across a page in left to right direction

5. select from among the 26 letters of the alphabet the ones needed to spell the words he wants and arrange them in proper sequence

6. make his hand do what his mind wants it to do in forming the letters so that they are legible (or strike the right keys on the typewriter)

7. use appropriate starting, stopping, and other punctuation--the traffic signals along the way to guide the reader.

As young children struggle with the complex task of putting ideas onto paper it is essential that all teachers maintain an attitude of patience and encouragement, for the ultimate satisfaction of producing a story, poem, or statement is truly one of the finest achievements.

The child can be shown how good form can help him say what he wants to say. Grammar should proceed toward a definition, from an understanding of the

function of words in use, not begin with a definition. Research supports the conclusion that the traditional ways of teaching grammar have not helped children to speak or write more effectively. Nevertheless, a teacher himself should have a good background knowledge of the system underlying the English language.

Spelling, punctuation, and handwriting are also simply means toward the end of better writing and speaking. They should never become ends in themselves, and the time and emphasis put on them reflect this attitude. These tools of language gain significance only as children see the need for them and can apply them.

Practice in writing should be frequent, though compositions need not be long. The length of a composition is a highly individual matter, to be determined by the scope and purpose of the writer, by what he has to say, and by how effectively he says it, rather than by a specified number of words or pages.

It is clear that writing is more than learning the skills of handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. The ability to arrange and select words to fit into patterns that express the thoughts and feelings of the author is of primary importance. Instruction and corrections should take the form of "What do you mean?" or "Does this say what you mean?"

Teachers who are aware of the developmental level of their students will recognize when they may need direct teaching of specific skills; after all, children do not acquire skills automatically.

Study of the English language cannot be arbitrarily separated into grade levels any more than it can be separated into spelling and writing and grammar. Children should be taught these skills as they need them and not at some imaginary "correct time."

Specific guidelines for developing written language and a variety of suggested activities for developing the language arts curriculum may be found in some of the books listed in Recommended References.

Resources for Further Reading

Ashley, Rosalind M. Successful Techniques for Teaching Elementary Language Arts. West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1970.

Moffett, James. A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-6: A Handbook for Teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968.

Shane, Harold G., James Walden, and Ronald Green. Interpreting Language Arts Research for the Teacher. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association, 1971.

Strickland, Ruth G. The Language Arts in the Elementary School. 3d ed. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1969.

Tiedt, Iris M. and Sidney W. Contemporary English in the Elementary School. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

VI. SEQUENTIAL OBJECTIVES IN THE LANGUAGE ARTS

In the NAIS publication Minimum Curriculum for Kindergarten through Grade Five, the Elementary Curriculum Committee set forth certain specific objectives for the grade levels. In accordance with current educational thinking, the present committee prefers to recommend that a more flexible approach be made toward defining objectives at various levels of competency.

Several educational groups and authors have made extensive studies of objectives for the areas of the language arts. Rather than reproduce these in detail here, we would like to suggest that each school obtain copies of these and adapt them to their own needs. It is up to the faculty of each school to decide what level of mastery is desirable for its own particular student body. Some recommendations and sources follow.

For those who want objectives in reading, we suggest the Wisconsin Design for Reading Skill Development: Rationale and Guidelines, prepared by Wayne Otto and Eunice Askov at the Wisconsin Research and Development Center for Cognitive Learning, at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, and published in 1970. It is reprinted in Hafner and Jolly, Patterns of Teaching Reading in the Elementary School, which is reviewed in Recommended References, at the end of this notebook. This outline deals with word attack, comprehension, study skills, self-directed reading, interpretive skills, and creative skills. An excerpt from the outline follows.

I. Word Attack

Level A

1. Listens for rhyming elements
   a. Words
      OBJECTIVE. The child is able to tell when (1) two words pronounced by the teacher (man, pan; call, bell; when, pen) and/or the names of two objects, do and do not rhyme (i.e., "sound alike").

   b. Phrases and verses
      OBJECTIVES. (1) The child is able to pick out rhyming words in traditional verses (i.e., "Little Jack Horner Sat in a Corner") and nonsense verses ("Wing, wong, way--Tisha, loona say") read by the teacher. (2) The child is able to supply the missing word in a rhyming verse read by the teacher (e.g., "The big tall man--Fried eggs in a ____").

2. Notices likenesses and differences
   a. Pictures (shapes)
      OBJECTIVE. The child is able to match key shapes with shapes that are identical in terms of form and orientation.

   b. Letters and numbers

It can be seen from the above sample that, since no grade level is specified, the material would apply to an individualized, nongraded reading program. Also, definite techniques for the assessment of competence are suggested in the outline.

The following set of objectives for grammar, punctuation, and capitalization is a composite drawn from Pose Lamb, Guiding Children's Language Learning (reviewed in Recommended References), and the NAIS publication Minimum Curriculum for Kindergarten through Grade Five.

I. Grammar

Level A
- Eliminate gross examples of nonstandard usage (ain't and hain't, brung, growed, knowed)
- Recognize a sentence in manuscript
- Express ideas so that audience will listen

Level B
- Eliminate additional examples of nonstandard usage (hisself, theirselves, them books, this here)
- Put self last
- Learn that a sentence tells or asks
- Express ideas so that others understand

Level C
- Learn standard usage (see, do, go, run, come, bring, and burst; has for has got, and have for have got)
- Put self last
- Use those and them correctly
- Make sentences complete thoughts
- See need for statements, questions, and commands
- Try to eliminate run-on sentences and use of and between sentences
- Use well-made and original sentences
- Use name, describing, and action words
- Understand word order and how it functions in grammar
- Construct sentence patterns
- Recognize nouns, noun markers, and pronouns and their functions
- Understand what verbs are

Level D
- Master the standard forms of common verbs
- Understand the terms "noun" and "verb"
- Understand singular possessive noun: _____'s
- Understand the subject, predicate, and word order
- Begin to understand coordination and subordination
- Understand the noun phrases, nouns with markers (modifiers)
- Understand the verb and verb markers (modifiers)
- Understand the adjectives and their inflections
- Understand the adverbs of place, time, and manner

II. Punctuation

Level A
- Use period and question mark for sentence endings
- Recognize use of exclamation point in reading
- Recognize use of quotation marks in reading

Level B
- Use comma in date
- Copy letter correctly using commas
- Put periods after numbers in a list
- Put commas in alphabetized list of names
- Put periods after abbreviations: Mr., Mrs., months

Level C
- Use period: statement, command, other abbreviations, initials
- Use comma: greeting, closing, date, address
- Use question mark
- Use apostrophe in singular possessive
- Use apostrophe in contractions

Level D
- Understand punctuation of a letter and use punctuation appropriately
- Understand punctuation as a tool for comprehension of personal communication in creative writing

III. Capitalization

Level A
- Know forms of capital and small letters
- Capitalize: name of person, name of pets, first word in a sentence, street, school, town

Level B
- Capitalize: Mr., Mrs., Miss, name of teacher, pets, days of the week and months, places

Level C
- Capitalize: heading on papers, first word in sentence, first lines of verse, proper names, common holidays, buildings, the word I, title of a book, report, story, poem, list, or outline

Level D
- Master all of above and extend to include use of capitals for emphasis

As a guide for the teacher in beginning paragraph construction, the committee recommends a sequential outline for paragraph composition by

Leo Schell in Funk and Triplett, Language Arts in the Elementary School: Readings, listed in the Recommended References. The outline has for its topics the following:

A. A paragraph should deal with a single topic
   1. Suggested instructional activities
      a. Detect and discuss extraneous sentences
      b. . . .

B. A paragraph typically has a topic sentence
   1. Topic sentences should be general, not specific, e.g., . . .
   2. . . .

C. A paragraph develops a topic
   1. There are many kinds of paragraph organization
      a. Description (details)
      b. Reasons or proof
      c. . . .

D. Sentences in a paragraph are related to each other . . .

E. A long, self-contained, expository paragraph should be concluded or summarized with a general sentence related to the topic or beginning sentence, e.g., . . .

F. The last sentence of one paragraph may lead into the next paragraph, e.g., . . .

For spelling, a teacher will no doubt be guided by the words children need for their writing, not only in personal communication and creative writing, but in science, social studies, and other subjects. Frequency-of-use lists are available in a number of texts. One that is helpful is the Kucera-Francis list, found in Hafner and Jolly, Patterns of Teaching Reading in the Elementary School. Since learning to spell is related to perception, recall, and reproduction of symbols, we recommend some suggestions for teachers given by Edna Furness in Funk and Triplett, Language Arts in the Elementary School: Readings. The suggestions are organized under developing visual, aural, kinesthetic, and dual or multiple-sense approaches to learning words.

VII. LEARNING PROBLEMS AND DIAGNOSTIC TEACHING

Learning Problems

What are the probable causes of learning problems? What steps can be taken to identify and deal with these problems?

Inadequate language development. A child may suffer from insufficient exposure to oral language at home or from a lack of opportunity to participate in conversation because older children in the family tend to dominate. Such a child will benefit from a classroom that is rich in a variety of experiences specifically designed for oral language development. Another cause might be basic weakness in ability to process stimuli. Weaknesses may range from slight to severe and may appear in different combinations. Certain dysfunctions contribute to difficulty in dealing with speech and language; others affect the ability to deal with written symbols. It is important to identify children who are experiencing difficulty in understanding language or making themselves understood. If their inadequacies do not stem from insufficient experience, special testing should be recommended.

General immaturity. Maturational changes are unique to the individual. They cannot be rushed; to do so is useless and perhaps even harmful. If maturation is to proceed at an appropriate rate, however, environmental stimulus is needed. In the school setting, where experiences can be for the most part controlled, special attention should be given to the timing of instruction, with care being taken to ensure requisite maturity. It is important to consider the child's over-all development and to make sure that signs of readiness are observable for each new learning experience.

Inadequate intellectual development. Success in dealing with language, either oral or written, depends on many specific skills. These are measured by an intelligence test and are expressed in terms of Intelligence Quotient (IQ) or Mental Age (MA). A breakdown of the test, which takes subscores into account, is significant to anyone who has been trained in educational testing. The classroom teacher should seek the help of such a person in evaluating an IQ score. If there is a question about the reading potential of a student, the MA is more informative than the IQ, especially with younger students. Research indicates that oral language development is the best single indicator of reading potential, and that high intelligence does not guarantee success in reading. Some of the most severely retarded readers have IQ's of 130 or more. It is important to maintain a certain skepticism about low IQ scores for at least two reasons: (1) a child who has had inadequate sensory experience generally does poorly on intelligence tests, and (2) test performance depends greatly on attitude, interest, and motivation.

Social and emotional problems. A student's self-image has great influence

on his learning ability. A poor self-image can be the cause of insecurity and withdrawal from the demands of the environment, but it can also develop as a result of failure to achieve. If a child does not learn to read along with his peer group, normal development is blocked and he suffers a tremendous threat to his self-esteem. Which is cause and which is effect becomes clearer when the student's school history is examined: was the child's social-emotional adjustment satisfactory before reading and writing instruction began? What has caused him to feel inadequate? Identification of causes can give direction to the kinds of help a student requires both in and out of the classroom.

A child whose self-image is poor tends to avoid challenging situations. He does not think of himself as an able person and so he lacks independence and initiative in weak areas. He may require more support and reassurance from the teacher than other students. Such a child will benefit from activities in which he can experience success.

A different kind of problem is presented by the child who comes from an environment where the value structure is different from that of the school. He may, for instance, be predisposed to failure because he cannot gain respect from the neighborhood gang through academic achievement. Understanding this situation should help the teacher to take a pragmatic approach to reading assignments, knowing that the more personally interesting and useful the content is the more likely the student will be to get caught up in it.

The opposite situation also exists. Not reading can be a child's way of resisting parents who are overly ambitious for him and are exerting too much pressure. Parent-teacher conferences provide the opportunity for the teacher to verify suspicions of parental pressure and advise against it. Many times parents can be led to understand the difference between interested support and pressure.

The overly protected child who remains emotionally immature may fail at reading because he views it as an adult activity: to read would mean assuming a frightening independence. Such a child is probably overdependent in other aspects of his life, too. The most effective kind of help a teacher can give to such a child is to ignore immature behavior and give positive attention, which will act as a reinforcement, when the child's behavior is mature.

Emotional problems that develop because a child has been deprived of emotional satisfaction in the early years of life are usually apparent when he first comes to school. Several kinds of behavior are associated with such deprivation: (1) unusually aggressive, (2) unusually withdrawn, (3) a consistent tendency to display submissiveness, and (4) a tendency to regress and behave like a much younger child. Unfortunately, the kind of behavior a child exhibits when he is in the greatest need works against him and becomes self-defeating. For example, if a child in need of love and affection becomes aggressive, he is even less likely to get what he wants. Adults tend to pay attention to behavior and not to its probable causes. If a child is aggressive because he needs love, we are less apt to love him. We are concerned about stopping aggression, and our first effort is usually directed to some form of unloving coercion. The aggressive child needs our support and direction. He needs to feel that he receives more attention when his behavior is

appropriate than he does when he is overtly bidding for attention. The teacher can set a good emotional climate in a classroom by his comments and tone of voice.

Physical health. Ill health can impede progress in school. Such conditions as asthma, heart trouble, allergies, and infections are often associated with poor achievement. Long absences from school in the first few years can be harmful. It should be noted, in this regard, that a larger number of short-term absences scattered over the year are often even more damaging because they do not demand the same attention as prolonged absence.

A lethargic child may be malnourished, and it is not only the children of poor families who have inadequate diets. Talking in the classroom about what we eat and observing the lunches children bring from home can offer clues to the presence of such deprivation.

Inadequate sight and hearing can obviously cause a child to have difficulty in school. Most schools today provide gross screening in these areas. Because teachers and parents usually investigate the possibility of poor vision as a cause of reading problems, it need not be stressed here.

Hearing loss can also be a handicap to a child, depending on the extent of the loss, the child's ability to compensate for it, and the teaching methods used. Such a child needs to have visual rather than oral methods stressed in learning to read.

Weakness in visual perception and visual memory. Visual perception should not be confused with visual acuity. Many children who have good vision are unable to see the distinguishing features of letters and words. A great deal of attention has been given to perceptual problems in recent years. Reading-readiness tests provide some means of evaluating visual perception. Clinical and educational psychologists are able to provide a more complete evaluation through certain subtests of the Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children (WISC) and the Bender Visual Motor Gestalt Test. Even when weaknesses have been detected, however, it is not always clear whether the causes are emotionally or neurologically based.

While the classroom teacher usually does not administer tests of visual perception or visual memory, he is in a position to observe the perceptual functioning of a child in tasks both related and unrelated to words and letters. Children's artwork, for example, reveals much about how they see things and the extent of their visual memory.

Sometimes poor visual memory for words and numbers is the result of failure to perceive them carefully in the first place. Anxiety can also contribute to poor performance. Many children who have difficulty with words have no problem with other forms or shapes or with numbers. Some children experience difficulty in perceiving all visual detail.

Weakness in visual perception and discrimination can often be alleviated

through specific teaching techniques. It should be noted, however, that there is no conclusive evidence yet that would justify perceptual training by using shapes, forms, and designs as a preliminary to learning letters. There appears to be little correlation between identifying shapes (such as triangles, squares, and circles) and learning to identify and write letters. If our concern is with reading and writing, then attention should be given to the letters themselves--by tracing, writing, matching, establishing left-to-right directionality in writing parts of letters (i.e., d and b: describing the sequence--"around and down" for d, "down and around" for b). Saying, feeling, hearing, and seeing the differences makes it easier to identify letters correctly.

Weakness in auditory perception and auditory memory. A child's speech is usually a good indication of auditory acuity and perception, for we speak as we hear. However, children who do not have articulation problems may still be weak in auditory discrimination, which is significant in poor reading achievement. This can be observed in children who have difficulty identifying the likeness or difference of paired words, discerning particular sounds (phonemes) within words, or blending.

There are several auditory-discrimination tests the classroom teacher can use to determine strengths and weaknesses in this area. Some commercially available tests are useful. The purpose of such testing should be to establish good discrimination in simple tasks before advancing to more complex ones. In other words, children should be able to identify sounds such as sirens, bells, and hammering before trying to decide if two words begin with the same sound. As skill is demonstrated on each level of difficulty, testing and teaching progress to discrimination and identification of initial consonants, final consonants, medial vowels, blends, diphthongs, and digraphs. Auditory-discrimination weaknesses can be diminished through systematic auditory exercises. Tape recorders are excellent for the child who needs more than average help in this area.

Auditory memory is affected by anxiety and inattention, lack of familiarity with the language or dialect of the speaker, or inadequate experience. If memory weakness is apparent, the teacher should note whether memory for significant material is superior to rote memory for unrelated facts. If one aspect of memory is stronger than the other, differences in approach and emphasis are called for.

Inappropriate educational experiences. The emotional climate of the school, the kind of control exercised in the classroom, the availability and use of instructional materials, classroom organization, library facilities, grouping practices, sizes of classes, types of educational measurements, space, size of the school, and other related factors all have a bearing on the progress, or lack of progress, a student will make.

The fact that the classroom teacher cannot exercise control in all of these areas should not make him feel discouraged--or relieved. Too often teachers fall into two extremes, either viewing their influence on the student

as insignificant in comparison with the negative effects of a poor home environment or important weaknesses in the school environment, or assuming more responsibility for the child's progress than is realistic, all other things being considered (these are the worriers). Both extremes can be modified with greater knowledge and understanding.

Multiple causes. In most cases, children who are disabled readers are found to be laboring under a number of different handicaps. A child can usually work with a single handicap if he has sufficient strengths in other areas. In seeking causes we are not attempting to fix blame; our purpose should be to discover ways to correct unfavorable conditions.

Diagnostic Teaching

What is diagnostic teaching? Should every teacher teach diagnostically?

Whereas the term "diagnostic teaching" might suggest to some an effort to determine causes and remedies of problems, it is concerned with prevention as well. If instruction is to be effective, it must be based on the needs and interests of the specific child, and this can only be accomplished through the information gained about that child from diagnostic teaching.

Albert Harris explains that "diagnosis is a word that comes from two Greek roots, dia meaning through or thoroughly, and gnosis meaning knowledge; its literal meaning is to know thoroughly" (How to Increase Reading Ability, p. 200). The purpose of diagnostic teaching, therefore, is to get to know the child thoroughly through individual instructional tasks and experiences. Diagnostic teaching is time-consuming, but in the long run it saves more time by helping the teacher to focus attention on the areas of greatest need and to avoid unnecessary practice and instruction.

Ruth Strang enumerates seven principles of diagnostic teaching, indicating how to translate them into practice:[1]

1. Determine where a child is functioning, start instruction at or slightly below that point.

2. Success has a tonic effect; nothing succeeds like observed success . . . In general, success is more conducive to learning than failure, reward more than punishment, praise more than blame.

3. Respect for the pupil increases his self-esteem and self-confidence.

4. Learning takes place in a relationship. In conveying a warm, friendly feeling and positive regards, the teacher's manner and

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[1]From pp. 3-5 of Diagnostic Teaching of Reading, 2d ed., by Ruth Strang. Copyright 1969 by McGraw-Hill, Inc. Used with permission of McGraw-Hill Book Company.

action speak louder than words . . . When the teacher's face lights up at the student's successful performance, or when he takes the trouble to find an interesting book or to make suitable exercises that will help the student improve, then the student knows that the teacher cares.

5. There is no substitute for skillful instruction based on an analysis of the learning process.

6. There should be an atmosphere of children learning and growing.

7. The teacher needs to be alert to pick up the indirect and incidental clues to the difficulties that they reveal in their discussion, conversation, written work and other behavior.

Diagnostic teaching is concerned with both strengths and weaknesses, for it would be wrong to focus attention exclusively on what the child cannot do. Labels such as "dyslexia" alarm parents and only increase the child's anxiety about himself and should be avoided. (Few people agree on when and how the term should be applied, anyway.) An important part of diagnostic teaching is to encourage the student to engage in self-appraisal, a process in which he should increase in proficiency throughout his school year.

Classroom observations and their use. Kindergarten teachers' observations have been found to be more effective in identifying children with learning disabilities than any battery of tests. Yet even though a teacher's appraisal may be accurate, he is often unable to identify underlying causes and make a reliable evaluation.

Teachers should be aware that their observations often tell more about themselves than the child. Superficial impressions, personal bias, inability to reach the child, or the child's personal animosity may make it difficult to be objective and receptive to what the child is trying to communicate through his personal behavior.

The purpose of tests administered in the classroom should be to provide an opportunity for the teacher to learn more about the student. Attitudes and values are often revealed during the taking of tests. Is the child a plodder--slow but sure? Is he hasty and superficial? Does he have a sustained attention span or does he give up easily? Is there a marked difference in his approach to arithmetic and reading?

Ideally, a uniform checklist should be made up for the teachers in the school for recording observations of specific skills. These lists will be useful not only to the teacher who is currently teaching the child but also to other teachers, in providing comparative observations, at some future time. Such a checklist should be organized around the classroom activities and situations and should include descriptions of specific behavior. Space should be provided for further observation, which should be as complete and brief as possible.

If observations are going to describe the typical behavior and performance of a child, they must be recorded frequently and systematically. To offset the possibility of the teacher's view being too much colored by an isolated incident, observations should be recorded according to a plan. Sometimes it is a good idea to observe one small group of children for a week at a time, and then choose a different group the next week. Children who exhibit extremes of behavior (aggressive, withdrawn, immature, timid, fantasizing, negative, uncooperative) should have, along with regular observations, suggestions for special ways to help them. When adjustment is consistently poor, or when behavior changes suddenly, the teacher should make a prompt appraisal of the total situation and act on it. Ordinarily, however, routine observation will provide the information needed for writing a useful summary paragraph for the cumulative record.

Parent conferences: an information-sharing device. Parents can provide important information about a child. In conferences with parents, it is essential to be noncritical (or nonjudgmental) if true feelings are to be expressed. Even when good rapport seems to have been established, a teacher must realize that parents often will find it necessary to protect themselves. The impressions they convey should be so interpreted. Knowledge of the size of the family, its socioeconomic status, the neighborhood, the kind of intellectual stimulation provided, parent-child relationships, sibling rivalries, efforts the parents make to assist with homework, the child's outside interests and playmates, and both the child's and the parents' attitude toward school and themselves--all these provide clues that may be significant and revealing. Furthermore, information about events at home often accounts for changes in school behavior, for better or worse.

Simply stated, then, diagnostic teaching is really an attempt to identify the individual child's strengths and weaknesses, using every resource--teacher and parent observations, tests, identification of causes of problems--and with that information to set up a program that will help that child to develop to the greatest possible degree.

RECOMMENDED REFERENCES FOR A FACULTY LIBRARY

Books

Ashley, Rosalind Minor. Successful Techniques for Teaching Elementary Language Arts. West Nyack, N.Y.: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1970. This planbook, full of easy-to-use classroom-tested techniques, gives effective ways to teach important facets of the language arts, including methods and techniques for individualized instruction.

Barbara, Dominick A. The Art of Listening. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1958. This sensible book provides insight into the relation between listening and communication. It helps the reader to understand the difference between useful listening and passive or marginal listening.

Durkin, Dolores. Teaching Them to Read. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970. Although primarily a text for teachers in training, this book has many important suggestions for the teacher already in service. It offers a number of approaches to reading supported by research and evaluates different methods of instruction. It also grapples with the problem of reading comprehension. It is most valuable for its wide-ranging approach to reading.

Funk, Hal D., and DeWayne Triplett, eds. Language Arts in the Elementary School: Readings. Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Co., 1972. This valuable collection of articles by well-known authorities in the field of language teaching also includes suggestions for classroom organization, lists of objectives for the language arts, ideas for handling diversity of language skill in the classroom, thoughts on handwriting, and many other topics. There is important material here for the administrator as well as the teacher.

Hafner, Lawrence E., and Hayden B. Jolly. Patterns of Teaching Reading in the Elementary School. New York: Macmillan, 1972. This book is one of the most important recent publications on the teaching of reading. It explains, in an easily comprehended style, the complexity of teaching reading and yet it provides specific information for accomplishing the task. There are recommended guidelines and patterns for teaching basic reading skills, descriptions and evaluations of new approaches and materials for instruction, descriptions and directions for a variety of tests and teaching aids, as well as an appendix containing publishers' addresses, teacher-constructed reading tests, an outline of reading objectives on successively difficult levels of instruction. It is a book for the classroom teacher and the remedial reading teacher.

Harris, Albert J. How to Increase Reading Ability. 5th ed. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1970. This book is used as a text for both undergraduate and graduate students. It is valuable to the reading specialist and the classroom teacher alike. The subject is exhaustively

covered in clear terms from a practical point of view, with many good illustrations and examples. Some of the questions teachers ask most frequently are answered. The three major divisions of the book deal with the over-all classroom reading program, methods of evaluating and diagnosing group and individual reading needs, and developmental and remedial teaching of specific reading skills.

Heilman, Arthur W. Phonics in Proper Perspective. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1968. This succinct, practical paperback provides the beginning and the experienced teacher with specific structures for understanding phonics in relation to reading that are helpful in teaching phonics and in understanding the purpose of teaching phonics.

Lamb, Pose. Guiding Children's Language Learning. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Co., 1971. This text helps the reader get an understanding of the interrelation of the various aspects of the language arts. It also contains explicit and immediately helpful suggestions for initiating and sustaining language development, creative drama, listening, writing and penmanship, composition, spelling, and grammar. The suggestions for evaluation in the final chapter are thoughtful and explicit enough to be helpful to most teachers. Lists of structured objectives are provided under each heading.

Moffett, James. A Student-Centered Language Arts Curriculum, Grades K-6: A Handbook for Teachers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968. Moffett's handbook is not a teacher's manual. It presents a philosophy of teaching the language arts as well as many practical suggestions for achieving literacy in the classroom. This book need not be read in its entirety for maximum value. Dipping into sections of interest can be most profitable. The author's ideas about reading comprehension are especially important; every teacher should read this section.

Shane, Harold G. Linguistics and the Classroom Teacher. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association, 1967. This is a "first book" for teachers who want to know more about the field of linguistics and how it might influence their teaching and understanding of language. Mr. Shane's lively style makes this controversial and complex subject highly readable. The glossary is helpful for reading other articles and publications. The book is brief and compact, yet it contains all the information that might be included in a heavier tome.

Shane, Harold G., James Walden, and Ronald Green. Interpreting Language Arts Research for the Teacher. Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, National Education Association, 1971. This ASCD monograph focuses on developments in language arts since 1963. It is a review of the literature that describes or reports on research in language arts, which is particularly helpful as we evaluate old ideas and established practices in teaching.

Stauffer, Russell G. The Language-Experience Approach to the Teaching of Reading. New York: Harper & Row, 1970. Russell Stauffer's description

of an approach to reading should be an inspiration to teachers who want to depart from the basal-reader approach. In spite of the fact that he has written a most useful series of readers, he wrote this book out of a conviction that there was another way. No teacher can read it without wanting to try the method for the beginning years, at least. The book is spiced with real experiences of teachers and illustrations from work with children.

Strang, Ruth. Diagnostic Teaching of Reading. 2d ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1969. This text is designed primarily for the teacher of disabled readers, but it should be useful to any classroom teacher because of its emphasis on diagnostic teaching as a means of prevention. While considerable attention is given to motivating older students, which is not particularly applicable for primary teachers, the sections on record-keeping and appraisal through informal tests should prove valuable to all.

Strickland, Ruth G. The Language Arts in the Elementary School. 3d ed. Boston: D. C. Heath, 1969. This text is a "must" for any school library. Ruth Strickland's vast experience with children prompts her to write with perspective in a practical vein for the teacher. Although the book is arranged so that sections of interest can be read separately, every teacher will want to read it in its entirety.

Tiedt, Iris M. and Sidney W. Contemporary English in the Elementary School. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967. The Tiedts provide the elementary teacher with strategies and ideas for stressing imaginative, creative approaches to English. Translating theory into practice, the authors present many suggestions for transmitting concepts of the English language to young students. Emphasis is placed on oral language skills and composition as important aspects of language learning.

Periodicals

The English Teacher. National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, Ill. 61801.

The Reading Teacher. International Reading Association, 6 Tyre Avenue, Newark, Del. 19711.